Talking about Housing First: Engaging the expertise of peers in homelessness research and advocacy

Faith Elboff PhD(c) | Aaron Munro | Vancouver’s Housing First Speakers Bureau
University of British Columbia | RainCity Housing and Support Society | Vancouver BC | Canada

Vancouver’s Housing First Speakers Bureau is a peer-led initiative formed in 2011 by participants from the Vancouver site of the landmark Canadian At Home/Chez Soi study – the world’s largest demonstration project on Housing First for homeless individuals with mental illness in five cities across Canada (October 2009 – March 2013).

Introducing our Speakers Bureau members:

Angela
Andrew
Bobbie
Bonnie
Colin
Gary
Laszlo
Mad Dogg
Colleen
James
Nicholas
Oliver
Royal
Scott
Thomas
Sara
Trevor

For more information and to view some of our work please visit:
http://athome.nfb.ca/#/athomewww.raincityhousing.org

“Leaders, policy-makers and researchers who shape our health and housing strategies find it hugely beneficial to hear the voices of people with lived experience.”
City of Vancouver

“Here we all have our voices. We all have an opportunity to speak…”

• The Speakers Bureau is a group of people housed by the At Home/Chez Soi project who got together as a collective strategy to engage society and talk about mental health and homelessness.
• They received media training, and through a peer-support model, speak to a variety of community, policy, and academic audiences throughout the year.
• When the At Home/Chez Soi project ended, the Bureau partnered with the non-profit agency RainCity Housing to continue their work, and extended their reach through a community-academic collaboration with the University of British Columbia and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.
• Members of the Bureau are brave and generous individuals who share their ‘insider’ knowledge of what it’s like interacting with their community of choice and creating a safe place to live.
• They have received accolades from community stakeholders for generating candid, engaging and educational discussions, challenging myths and stereotypes associated with chronic homelessness.
• Speakers Bureau presentations create opportunities to advance mutual learning, promote more informed and balanced policy discussions, and share power in decision-making with people who are often excluded from conversations about policies and programming that directly affects their lives.

PEER SUPPORT MODEL
Monthly meetings and check-in
Members provide mutual support to one another
Preparation for and debriefing of presentations and media interviews
Development of public speaking skills; media training and guest speakers
Review and vet new speaking opportunities as a group
Speakers selected for engagements by consensus to ensure equal participation
Peer-support person available to speakers at engagements
Members provided with honoraria for meetings, speaking engagements and travel

NOTABLE MEDIA AND PUBLIC SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS
• Media: The Globe and Mail; The Vancouver Sun; French CBC Radio Canada
• Here At Home, Web documentary by the National Film Board of Canada
• All Our Sisters: National Forum on Women’s Homelessness (London ON, May 2014)
• Canadian Psychological Association Annual Convention (Vancouver, June 2014)
• Housing First: Principles into Practice Workshop and Video Series (Oct 2014)
• Mayors’ Roundtable on Mental Health and Addictions (Vancouver, Oct 2014)
• Canadian Public Health Association Annual Conference (Vancouver, May 2015)
• American Public Health Association Annual Meeting (Chicago, Nov 2015)
• Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness National Conference (Montreal, Nov 2015)

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